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The 2015 International Conference on Religion and Film

Abstract

This introduces the special issue of papers from the 2015 International Conference on Religion and Film in Istanbul, Turkey.

Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).

In May of 2015 the *Journal of Religion & Film* and the University of Nebraska at Omaha sponsored the 2015 International Conference on Religion & Film.¹ The conference was held in Istanbul, Turkey, and was hosted by the Center for Values Education (Degerler Egitimi Merkez) of Istanbul and the Ensar Foundation of Turkey. We were surprised to receive more than 370 paper proposals from scholars in more than 27 different countries. More than 250 of those proposals were written in Turkish, indicating a phenomenal interest in religion and film on the part of Turkish scholars and scholars from other Turkish language countries. Fortunately, the Conference selection committee included a number of Turkish speaking scholars who were able to read and assess the Turkish language proposals. We received another 120 or so proposals that were written in English. Most of these came from countries other than Turkey although some were written by scholars from Turkey and other Turkish language countries.

In order to make the Conference manageable, we limited the number of presenters to 100. Of those, 35 papers were presented in English and 65 were presented in Turkish. Since most of the participants spoke Turkish, the English language papers were translated into Turkish for presentation. In addition to the speakers and session chairs, roughly 350 people registered for the Conference. This remarkable participation in the Conference indicates a growing interest in religion and film throughout the world. The 2015 Conference was truly an international conference and we hope that it will encourage further interaction between scholars from around the world regarding the various topics and methods that comprise religion and film studies.

Although there were more Turkish scholars participating in the Conference than scholars from any other country, the paper topics ran the gamut from the nature of particular religions to

¹ In April of 2014 the *Journal of Religion & Film* sponsored the 2014 International Conference on Religion & Film. The 2014 Conference was hosted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha and was held in Omaha, Nebraska (U.S.A.).

stereotypes of religions in film to the analysis of particular films. The papers of the Conference mirrored the perspectives of papers regularly published in the *Journal of Religion & Film*. Some papers dealt with Islam, of course, but also Hinduism, mysticism, the Roman Catholic Church, Judaism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Christianity. Other papers dealt with the movies of particular countries or what might be called national cinemas while others dealt with blockbuster hits from Hollywood, including *The Matrix* and *Silence of the Lambs*. Other presentations focused upon topics like transcendence or cinema stereotypes, and the difference between movies that are overtly religious and make an effort to influence the religious beliefs of a particular audience and movies that tell stories but which also include messages about religion or religious themes. And, yet, other papers dealt with religion and film methodologies.

All of the papers from the 2015 International Conference on Religion & Film that were available by the deadline are published in *Sinema ve Din* (Religion and Film) published by DEM (Degerler Egitimi Merkez) Publishers of Istanbul, which will be available for purchase at <http://www.ensarnesriyat.com.tr/vitrin/prdquery.php?u=2>.

We are publishing this special issue of the *Journal of Religion & Film*, however, to give the papers of the Conference wider distribution. This special issue includes the English language papers from the Conference and adds to those papers several that were not available at the DEM deadline. These include Heidi Campbell's "Problematizing the Human-Technology Relationship Through Techno-Spiritual Myths Presented in *Her*, *Transcendence*, and *The Machine*," and David Shepherd's "Arthur Melbourne Cooper, The First Filmic Flood, and the Birth of the Animated Bible." We also include here two papers originally presented in Turkish that have been translated for us. These include Melih Coban's "Various Representations and Images of Jews in the Turkish

Cinema,” and Ridade Öztürk’s “Examining the Human from the Perspective of *Silence of the Lambs*.”

We want to take this opportunity to thank the Center for Values Education, the Ensar Foundation, and the city of Istanbul for their many contributions to the success of the 2015 International Conference on Religion & Film. The arrangements for the Conference were made by the people at the Center for Values Education and much of the success of the Conference was due to the excellent planning, hard work, attention to detail, and friendliness and helpfulness of the people from the Center. The generosity of the Ensar Foundation made it possible for many scholars from around the world to attend the Conference, scholars who would not have been able to attend the Conference otherwise. The result was a truly International Conference on Religion & Film. Finally we want to thank the city of Istanbul itself. Istanbul has such a rich history and so many sites that are of interest to people of multiple faiths, in addition to its beauty and the warm welcome Conference participants received from the city, that many Conference participants said that they will never forget their visit to Istanbul. We at the *Journal of Religion & Film* agree.